THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE

Uncle Sam's Greatest Bargain

By JOHN H. RAFTERY

Autumn

Missouri State Building With Mural Decorations by F. Luis Mora

Spring

Summer

THIS week begins the universal exposition at St. Louis. It is the centennial celebration of the acquisition of the territory of Louisiana. What is that?

The addition of the territory more than doubled the then total area of the United States without the shedding of a single drop of blood. It was consummated by the first far-reaching act of American diplomatic wisdom in the affairs of the great world. In a certain sense it was an early expression and performance of expansion, imperialism, world politics; for the West, from the farther shore of the Mississippi to the watershed of the Rocky mountains was as little a part of this country then as Canada, the British Dominion, is now.

A mere question of open navigation for the western states started the negotiations. New Orleans, island and city, was in possession of Spain and garrisoned by Spanish troops when the question became imminent. As yet there were no railroads; but the agricultural possibilities of the western possessions of the United States were beginning to develop, and open navigation of the Mississippi river to tidewater was an urgent problem. Thomas Jefferson was president. France had ceded to Spain all of her possessions west of the middle river, and to England all of her lands east of it. The war of the revolution had been fought and won by the states.

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It was necessary for the agricultural and maritime development of the West that the Mississippi should be open for navigation. The Spanish garrison at New Orleans was exacting, arbitrary, hostile. As a matter of fact, France, having ceded her western empire to Spain by published treaty, reacquired it by a secret compact—the treaty of San Ildefonso—but the world knew as little of this wily move of the first French consul as did the trappers, missionaries and adventurers who then made up the caucasian population of the farther west. Thomas Jefferson and his cabinet, having recondite knowledge of France's real ownership of the Louisiana territory, instructed Minister Livingston, and sent James Monroe to Paris, to begin negotiations for the purchase of the island and city of New Orleans.

The dreams of John Law may have had something to do with France's reacquired possession of the western wilds; the bursting of the "Mississippi Bubble" may have influenced its final sale. Contemporaries of the great Corsican have never been quite sure as to whether he sold the Louisiana territory to the United States because he needed the money for the equipment of his armies, or because he wished to establish in the western hemisphere a worthy, mighty and perpetual rival of his arch enemy, England. It is a matter of established history, however, that from Napoleon himself came the first suggestion to the American commissioners, that instead of buying only the island and city of New Orleans they should buy the whole of that one million square miles of wilderness, as yet unexplored, which would give command of not only middle-continent navigation, but of a vast region whose possibilities were unguessed and whose acreage was uncharted.

However, when Thomas Jefferson first displayed an intention of considering France's offer to cede the territory for a consideration of fifteen million dollars, about three and a half millions of which was to offset the old spoilation claims, the president's political opponents began to ridicule his policy. They spoke with scorn of "Jefferson's Fairyland," and discussed with trepidation the enormousness of the price.

It is an interesting reflection now to know that the city of St. Louis alone pays annually into the internal revenues of the United States more than fifteen million dollars—more than the total sum paid for that million square miles of land which is now admitted to be, agriculturally and minerally, the richest area of its acreage and size in all the world. Colorado alone, in gold and precious metals, yields annually more than the total cost of the Louisiana territory, and the cereal and cattle wealth of a few counties in Kansas would now pay the whole bill that Jefferson contracted with France for the doubling of the colonial area of the United States in 1803.

St. Louis is now beginning a seven-month celebration of the cession of the Louisiana purchase from France to the United States. As a matter of bald record, the settlement of St. Louis, though accomplished principally by French missionaries and French trappers, was effected under Spanish rule, and within the whole period of France's reacquisition of the region the French flag never waved above that outpost, and the settlers there believed themselves to be subjects of Spain. Florissant, eighteen miles northwest of St. Louis, a hill-encinctured village which yet stands in the suburbs of the Missouri metropolis, was a considerable town when Pierre Laclede built the first log house in the "Future Great." Ruins of old Spanish fortresses yet remain, and some of the old, vine-clad homes of Florissant are built upon the foundations and lower floors of the homes of Spanish adventurers of noble blood and lawless deeds who were first to choose homes in this most beautiful of valleys.

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For but a single day, in 1803, the French flag waved upon the military jack-staff in St. Louis, and it was raised and lowered for no better purpose than to give final effect to the passing of the territory from Spain to France and from France to the United States, for the brief flutter of the tri-color was almost immediately followed by the hoisting of the stars and stripes.

And yet it is not fair to deny a French origin to St. Louis. Indeed, the pioneer processes of the Spaniards never won an enduring way into the wilderness. The route of De Soto and his embattled paladins from Florida to the Mississippi was bathed in blood that washed away with the rains of succeeding springs and left no permanent trace of Castilian dominance after it. The advent of the French was of another quality. From the rivers of the east and north came cross-bearing, peace-loving missionaries, dauntless trappers who sought commerce and who made forts into warehouses and taught traffic instead of treachery. To these French messengers of truth and trade is largely due the first steps toward the pacific winning of the West; so that although St. Lous was never actually a French settlement as far as government or national guardianship goes, yet its origin as a city is French, and some of the best blood of old France yet courses in the veins of its oldest families.

In Paris, when the treaty had been consummated, Livingston seized Monroe by the hand, saying: "We have lived long, but this is the noblest work of our lives!"

And Napoleon, regarding them, answered: "This cession of territory strengthens forever the power of the United States. I have just given to England a maritime rival that will, sooner or later, humble her pride."

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Thus far the world has known no festival enterprise so magnificently disposed, so vast in area and in cost, so transcendently beautiful as was the Columbian exposition at Chicago eleven years ago. The white city in Jackson park set a pace for all the world, and observers of world-wide experience have said that its equal would never be known.

The Louisiana purchase exposition is the Columbian exposition multiplied by two. To the St. Louis enterprise has been brought all of the experience of Philadelphia, Chicago, Omaha, Charleston, Buffalo and Paris. In size it is equal to all of those famous expositions put together. Its acreage is twice greater than that of the Chicago world's fair; its total cost is now estimated at sixty million dollars, to which the twenty-seven million dollars expended at the Columbian fair seems small by contrast. The sums appropriated and expended by foreign nations and states at St. Louis are twice greater than were ever outlayed at any universal exposition.

From the beginning the nations of Europe and of Asia expressed an extraordinary interest in the "new American exposition." It is not hard to find the reason. The military and commercial performance of the United States within the past decade has put this country into a new light before the world. The "peaceful invasion" of Europe, the naval deeds of Dewey, Schley and Sampson, the almost inescapable world-power attitude which this government assumed so gracefully in the Philippines, in Hawaii and in the West Indies, the demeanor of our troops and diplomats in the Boxer uprising—all of these separate influences doubtless conspired to lend an exaggerated idea of the importance of the world's fair which St. Louis projected about five years ago.

The attitude of the late President William McKinley toward the exposition was also largely responsible for the significance and scope which the undertaking gained for itself at the outset. The government of the United States is almost a half-partner in the St. Louis fair. Its buildings, its exhibits, its entrance into comparative demonstration in all departments with the governments of Europe the extraordinary sums of money which it has appropriated or